



VIRTUAL COUNTER-TERRORISM WEEK

6-10 JULY 2020

Press Release

The United Nations warns that terrorism did not pause during the global pandemic and calls on the international community to stay united in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism.

New York, 6 July 2020 – The week-long [Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week](#) kicked-off today to discuss the strategic and practical challenges of countering-terrorism in a global pandemic environment.

Organized by the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), this initiative aims to provide a platform for a collective reflection on the implications of the COVID-19 crisis on the Member States' counter-terrorism priorities and the United Nations' work to support them in tackling this scourge at the national, regional and international levels. The Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week takes place in the context of the commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations reflecting on the “world we want and the United Nations we need.”

Speaking at the high-level opening session, the **Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres**, stated that “Like the virus, terrorism does not respect national borders. It affects all nations and can only be defeated collectively. So, we must harness the power of multilateralism to find practical solutions”.

The head of the United Nations warned that “ISIL, Al-Qaida, their regional affiliates – as well as neo-Nazis, white supremacists and other hate groups – seek to exploit divisions, local conflicts, governance failures and grievances to advance their objectives.” The pandemic has compounded existing challenges, such as the fate of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters in detention and their families, who are stranded in camps in Syria and Iraq. It has also exposed vulnerabilities to new and emerging forms of terrorism, including bio and cyber terrorism.

António Guterres urged Member States to keep the momentum in the fight against terrorism and be innovative in their responses, which must protect and promote human rights. “We must commit to do more and better. As in every other area of our mission. Our work should be assessed by the difference we make in people’s lives”, he stressed.

The Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week encompasses a total of ten webinars and interactive discussions, in which more than 1000 representatives from Member States, United Nations entities, international and regional organizations, civil society and the private sector will address key counter-terrorism topics in light of the COVID-19 crisis across all four pillars of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

These topics include bio and cyber terrorism, high-risk threats and trends, addressing the plight of victims of terrorism, flagship UN counter-terrorism programmes, human rights and counter-terrorism, countering the financing of terrorism, youth-led initiatives to build resilient societies, and the role of civil society and the media in countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism conducive to terrorism. The Week will also include the launch of a virtual exhibition (UNCCT Expo) showcasing the work of the [United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre](#) – a global capacity-building Centre of Excellence serving the Member States and the international community.

The **UN Under-Secretary-General for Counter-Terrorism, Vladimir Voronkov**, stressed in his opening statement that although the number of terrorist attacks and fatalities has been declining since the peak reached during the rise of ISIL, terrorism remains a major threat to international peace and security, and some groups are extending their reach into new areas. He highlighted recent successes of the United Nations in contributing to the efforts of many Member States and international actors to effectively address the threat of terrorism and reiterated the United Nations' commitment to continue to do so in the context of COVID-19.

Mr. Voronkov noted that UNOCT and the other [42 United Nations entities and partners](#) participating in the [Global Counter-Terrorism Compact](#) are implementing more than 300 counter-terrorism capacity-building projects around the world, benefitting 72 countries through a global and comprehensive approach.

The **high-level opening session also included statements by** Mr. Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, EU Commission Vice President; Mr. Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations; Mr. Kais Kabtani, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations and Chair of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee; Ms. Ghada Fathi Waly, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; Mr. Fabrizio Hochschild Drummond, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Commemoration of the United Nations' 75th Anniversary; Ms. Āsa Regnér, Deputy Executive Director of UN Women; and Mr. John Frank, Vice-president for UN Affairs of Microsoft. ([Quotes from their statements below](#))

The exchange of views and ideas in the Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week will feed into next year's High-Level Counter-Terrorism Week to take place during the 75th session of the General Assembly, which will include the seventh biennial review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the Second Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of the Member States, and the Global Congress of Victims of Terrorism.

ADDITIONAL QUOTES

Mr. Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, EU Commission Vice President

“We need to stay vigilant, as new social and political grievances caused by the economic downturn will provide fertile breeding ground, both in the streets and online”.

“None of us can fight terrorism alone. The EU will continue to strengthen its partnerships with the leading global actors, first and foremost with the United Nations.”

Mr. Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations:

“Fighting a pandemic and fighting terrorism have much in common. Both require policies that promote prevention, protection, and resilience—and, to succeed, collective effort.”

Mr. Kais Kabtani, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations and Chair of the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee:

“With global attention focused on pandemic-related challenges, terrorist groups are seeking to capitalize on the situation by undermining State authority and launching new attacks.”

“Moving forward, the international community must work together to develop responses to counter-terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism that are based on a comprehensive and integrated whole-of-society approach, place human rights and gender responsiveness at the forefront, and promote equality, human dignity, and pluralism.”

Ms. Ghada Fathi Waly, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime:

“Assistance must further address prevention of radicalization to violence in prison settings, which are acutely vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19 and which represent a potential breeding ground for terrorists.”

Mr. Fabrizio Hochschild Drummond, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Commemoration of the United Nations’ 75th Anniversary:

Where we cut corners and violate human rights or operate outside the rule of law, there is a risk of exacerbating distrust and subsequent extremist activity rather than curtailing it.

Ms. Āsa Regnér, Deputy Executive Director of UN Women:

“...as in all emergencies there are challenges and opportunities. For example, the Covid19 response is an opportunity to reset counter terrorism and prevention of violent extremism interventions by recognizing and valuing the role women play at the local level during crisis and emergencies and improving inclusivity of women in emergency plans decision making processes”.

Mr. John Frank, Vice-president for UN Affairs of Microsoft.

“As we think about the opportunities and challenges of building back better, I want to encourage us all to think about how we can get the best from multilateral cooperation, and how we can find new ways to engage all parts of societies with multi-stakeholder initiatives. While it’s important for governments to talk with other governments, and businesses to talk with other businesses, and civil society groups to talk with other civil society groups, we can all be more productive and effective if we cooperate together.”

For more information:

- Visit: www.un.org/counterterrorism/2020-counter-terrorism-week
- Contact: gerardl@un.org
- Follow us on Twitter @UN_OCT and through the Week’s key hashtags: #VirtualCTWeek #UNCCTExpo #UNiteToCounterTerrorism